

SPEECH OF DR. RADHAKRISHNAN

at
the inauguration of
the Drama Seminar



I am happy to be here and inaugurate the seminar on drama. I see from your programme that you are having discussions on the state and development of drama in the various languages of our country. You will no doubt consider the technical problems of dramaturgy, the mechanics of writing, the place of music and dance in drama, stage scenery, the duration of the plays, stage direction and costumes. I shall content myself with a few general observations. I have neither the knowledge nor the competence to do anything more.

Last year we had the film seminar. While the film is a modern invention, drama has been with us for a long time past. Indian tradition preserved in the *Natya-sastra* claims for the drama a divine origin. It is said to be the fifth Veda intended to give pleasure to both eyes and ears and transmit the ultimate truths.¹ Brahma took the element of recitation from the *Rg. Veda*, song from the *Sama Veda*, the mimetic art from the *Yajur Veda* and sentiment from the *Atharva Veda*. At Brahma's bidding, the Divine architect, Visvakarman built a playhouse. In Indian drama, however, the stage properties were few and simple. We did not have much elaborate scenery but the effects were produced by gestures. Watering a plant was done by a gesture imitation of the process which satisfied the audience. Plants were not brought on the stage and watered. Normally we have actors (*nata*) and actresses (*nati*). Sometimes a hero's part is performed by a girl.

A dramatic performance became an art when recitation, gestures, movements, dance

are used to rouse sentiments in the minds of the audience. *Natyadarpana* says :

natakam iti natyati vicitram ranjanat
pravesena sabhyanam hrdayam nartayati
iti natakam.

Through poetry and drama, man reveals himself to himself. He mirrors his soul, he expresses the desires, the urges, the hopes, the dreams, the successes and failures in his struggle to make himself at home in the world. All literature is the expression of intensity of feeling
vakyam rasatmakam kavyam. Jagannatha Pandit says:

ramaniyarthā pratipadakam vakyam kavyam

Again *Kavikrtam kavyam*. *Kavya* is of two kinds, *sravya* and *drśya*. The latter is *nataka* or drama. The dramatist or the playwright delights us by the perfection of his art, its variety, its music and its mood. He can do so if he is a man of *svadhyaya* and *tapas*, of learning and intensity of spirit. If drama is to be one of the most powerful manifestations of the human mind, there must be maturity of mind and greatness of soul. Without these we cannot win and hold the affection of people across distances of time and space. If any literary work is to have enduring quality, abiding power, the author should have magnificence of mind and intensity of vision. If we work too much on the surface, the deeper and more obscure feelings of life find no adequate expression. Rootlessness in our lives reflects itself in the lack of richness in our lives and the superficial character in our writings. Our plays may be striking and admirable in many ways but they will not touch the depths in us. They may excite a tumult in our minds but not touch

¹ cp. "sarvasastrartha sampannam sarva silpa pradarsanam natyakhyam pancamam vedam setihasam karomy aham."



Delegates to the Drama Seminar.

the deeps. A great drama overwhelms, devastates, annihilates us and yet exalts us and makes us new.

The whole plentitude of the dramatist's inner vision is applied to the full extent of the world, to all its depths and heights. Any subject, any topic may be chosen for dramatic representation ; virtue and vice, joy and sorrow pride and prejudice. The world is complex and complicated.

kvacid vinavadyam kvacid api ca haheti
ruditam
kvacin nari ramya kvacid api jara-jar
jara-vapuh
kvacid vidvad-gosthi kvacid api
suramattakalaho
na jane samsarah kim amrtamayah,
kim visamayah.

Here the sound of vina, there the voice of wailing; here pretty women, there tottering withered dames; here the meeting of learned men; there the brawls of the drunken, I do not know whether this world is heaven or hell. The poet holds the mirror up to nature in all its variety.

Though we have the conflict between good and evil, the Indian view does not adopt a Manichean dualism, which believes in the ultimacy of the opposites of good and evil. Good is bound to triumph for there is a moral government of the universe. Truth will triumph, so beauty and goodness.

jagat trayam sambhava nartana sthali
natadhirajo' tra parah sivah svayam,
sabha nato ranga iti vyavasthithi
svarupatah saktiyutat prapancita.

Suffering is not the final end of life. That is perhaps why we do not have tragedies. There are tragic situations where man is at grips with fate, where there is an interplay of character and circumstance, but there are no tragic endings. For the writer has faith in the ultimate decency of things.

While the dramatist shows us the heights and depths to which man can rise or fall, he induces in us sympathy for the good and hatred of the evil. He affects our feelings directly and conveys ideas indirectly. The writer does not air his views but imperceptibly changes the life. As Mammata says in his *Kavyaprakasa* : *kantasammitatayopadesayuje*. He comments :

kanteva sarasatapadanenanabhimukhi-krtva
ramadivad vartitavyam na ravanadivad ity
upadesam ca yathayogam kaveh sahrdayasya
ca karotiti sarvatha tatra yataniyam.

An actor must be able to inspire in his audience the feelings of the characters he represents. There are some who hold that the actor should lose himself in his part; others think that he must be detached from it. By over-acting we sometimes tear a passion to tatters. We actors must not be overwhelmed by emotions but interpret them and present them in

intellectual terms.¹ It is said that King Kulasekhara of Tamilnad (12th century) when he heard the verse that Rama was alone to meet the fourteen thousand demons, he became so excited that he immediately armed himself from head to foot and was about to march with all his army to meet Ravana as an ally of Rama.

susrava tam imam slokam bhaktiman
kulasekharah
caturdasa-sahasrani raksasam bhima-
karmanam
ekas ca ramo dharmatma katham
yuddham bhavisyati
asahisnus tato'dharma-yuddham sigham
skhalad-gatih
dhanurvanam samadaya khadgam carma
ca viryavan
caturangabalopeto janasthanam
krtatvarah
tat ksane tasya pratastha sahayartham
hari-priyah²

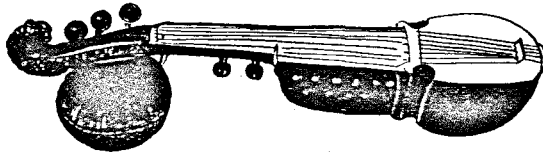
Indian drama has a great future. After independence there is a great quickening of the human mind, a renaissance of artistic activity. We hope that lasting works may be produced in this age. Both writers and actors are found in plenty. Indians have a natural gift for acting. I see in out-of-the-way small schools and colleges young boys and girls acting with such superb skill and grace that it fills me with hope for the future of drama in our country. In all our big centres new theatres

are springing up. Your Chairman is a playwright of distinction in Telugu. Your Vice-Chairman, Srimati Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya is the President of the Theatre Centre of India. In a theatre club, actors and writers and all those interested in drama may bring about greater understanding among theatre lovers. We may watch the theatre movements in other countries and profit from them. We must encourage artists to try new experiments and not always follow the beaten track.

Though artists are born, not made, training will help actors of both kinds. Every school and college should have a dramatic society. We must develop our drama in consistency with our temperaments and traditions. Drama is education, entertainment and recreation.

It is said that drama creates the conscience of the age. We cannot make people good by acts of parliament. Nor is it possible by constitutional provisions to remove deep-seated social prejudices. We influence social behavior by creating public opinion. I have known many playwrights and actors who have sweltered at the task of raising standards of behaviour in our country. I need not mention names. We will have social comedies and satires, serious dramas, and shadow plays.

I hope your deliberations will rouse public interest in the theatre movement and the art of the drama and result in the improvement of our standards.



¹ cp. *Mandara-makaranda* :

utpadayon sahrdaye rasajnanam niranntaram anukartru sthito yo'ratho' bhinayah
so'bhidhiyate.

² Anantacarya : *Prapannamrta* Chapter 86.